



COMING OF THE MILLENNIALS - REWRITING WORKPLACE STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

Progressive corporates all over the world have initiated strategies to tackle the challenge of catering to their millennial workforce in their combat to stay ahead and make profits. In their quest to find the right talent coupled with a deficit of skilled employees, Indian firms need to acknowledge that with every coming year, there would be more of millennial talent in their workforce composition and it would be imperative to meet their desires and expectations. Rigid adherence to outdated policies would no longer serve and organisations have to encourage their human resource personnel to be more bold, open, flexible, and innovative in revising and rewriting their human resource strategies. This study examines some of the characteristics by which millennials differ from the earlier workforce, and highlights key employee benefits areas that employers need to address which would help enhance their brand value and contribute immensely to their talent attraction, management and retention.

KEY WORDS: Millennials, Human Resource Strategies, Employee Benefits, Social Media, Flexibility, Learning and Development

Main Study

Introduction:

Globalization had brought about a change in the distribution of world jobs with emerging markets displaying a stronger economic growth and numerous business opportunities, for example, in the year 2010, one in three new jobs was created either in China or India. Research revealed that by 2030, emerging countries would produce 70% of the world gross domestic product growth, and 10 years henceforth, their equity market capitalization would reach USD 80 trillion, 1.2 times more than the developed world (Roland Berger Strategy Consultants, 2012). Rapid dispersion of technical knowledge globally had led to emerging markets gaining market share by cost effectively adapting developed countries technology or customizing value chains pioneered by the advanced economies. With favourable access to natural resources and national concessions, their growth trajectories would far surpass European projections over the next 20 years.

Projected opportunities necessitate Indian organisations to equip themselves with requisite infrastructures and policies to ensure optimum growth and profits. In such a scenario, attracting talented employees becomes crucial for employers who would have a growing number of millennials as their workforce. According to a Deloitte survey, the intention to move on was greater among millennials in emerging markets (69 percent) than in mature economies (61 percent) with India among three of the countries surveyed including Peru (82 per cent) and South Africa (76 percent) (Millennial Survey, 2016). This makes it very essential for Indian business houses to strategise their human resource programs to nurture loyalty among the new entrants or risk losing a large percentage of their workforces.

The Millennials:

The millennials, born between 1980 and 2000 (Waterworth, 2013), are currently the new entrants to the workplace worldwide and are estimated to make up 50 percent of the global workforce by 2020. India would be 'the youngest country' with 64 percent of its population in the working age group of 20-35 by 2021 according to the 2013-14 Economic Survey (Ramanathan, 2015). Millennials (also known as Gen Y) differ from previous workforce in their attributes, ambitions, and their affinity for technology which necessitates corporates to reshape their earlier practices. Rigid adherence to old policies would no longer serve them and human resource personnel have to be encouraged to be more open and flexible to accommodate the genuine needs and desires of their millennial employees.

Managing the Millennials:

Companies that desire to attract, manage and retain talented millennials would have to start reworking in these below-mentioned key employee benefit areas as they are considered to be more important and valuable by the millennial employees.

Employer Branding:

Millennials differ from past generations by their increased dependence on social media to learn about potential employers. This makes traditional recruitment methods such as job advertisements or exposures through marketing campaigns less effective tools in attracting them. Talented young employees rely on other sources such as opinions of people they know who work in the organisation or employees reviews in employer review websites. They consider them to be more credible channels to gather information about a company. This necessitates man-

agements to focus more on their internal branding activities to create a work environment that results in enthusiastic, engaged and loyal employees who in turn become their new brand ambassadors for attracting potential talent.

Learning and Professional Development:

Millennials are passionate about learning, gaining new experiences, absorbing latest information and have a strong desire to increase their market value from current job experience (Srivastava, 2012). Organisations should therefore take care in utilising the right channel to structure their millennials training programs. Their technology affinity calls for digital learning styles and delivery methods such as online learning modules, webinars or interactive game play. Also, since millennials are inherently collaborative and comfortable to learn in teams and appreciate on-the-job learning, due importance should be given to these preferences when designing their training programs.

Current globalisation has made international experience a vital element to a successful career. Millennials (71 per cent) have a strong desire to travel and work overseas as these assignments give them rich knowledge and expertise which helps them to reach higher levels (Opinium Research, 2011). Indian companies spread globally should ensure that all employees are given a fair share of international exposure to help build their attractiveness and increase loyalty.

Workplace mentoring has long been a neglected concept but this new generation places more value and responds well to mentoring by older employees. They prefer to have their bosses as coaches who guide and support them in their personal development. Hence employers should capitalise on the expertise of their senior employees and introduce a formal mentoring program which would help quicken Gen Y's learning process and help in their career advancement. Millennials are also eager to engage, interact and learn from top management. Progressive organisations have 'reverse mentoring' program where they pair top management with younger employees who coach them in IT, social media and the latest workplace trends. This strategy also helps to transfer corporate knowledge to millennials who would be ready to take on the responsibility of senior positions as they gain a valuable glimpse into the world of management via top-level access and helps reduce turnover.

Millennials place more emphasis and look for career development opportunities provided by an employer than their earlier generation. Career development strategies have to be effective in driving a sense of purpose to Gen Y's career growth and should include (i) Persuading superiors to identify and actively communicate their career paths as this would encourage millennials to prioritize and focus their growth opportunities around the roles they aspire to reach. (ii) Providing them with more special rotational assignments that would help them feel that they are moving towards something by gaining a variety of experiences. (iii) Challenging the 'creative' millennials to come up with new ways to streamline processes which would keep them energetic and engaged in their jobs.

Millennials value results over tenure and want career advancements more quickly than the older generations are accustomed to. Traditional methods of following promotions on seniority basis would frustrate them to the point of leaving. It becomes very essential for employers to reframe their policies to allow faster advancement for high achievers or at least innovate and offer simpler solutions like adding more levels, grades or other 'badges'.

Feedback: Millennials value feedback and seek honest and frequent feedbacks from their superiors. Immediate, effective feedback allows millennials to perform optimally and leads to efficient work flow. Managements need to rewrite their policies to supplement annual reviews with more regular formal feedbacks as well as encourage informal feedbacks. Setting clear targets and grooming managers to be proficient in giving sincere constructive feedback by highlighting positive contributions or improvements on key competencies becomes crucial for the success of their feedback system.

Flexibility:

Generation Y believes working in communities of mutual interest and passion. They are uncomfortable with strict business hierarchies and want more flexibility unlike earlier generations who craved for security and structure. Research had shown 65 per cent millennials stating that rigid hierarchies and outdated management styles failed to get the most out of them (Opinium Research, 2011). Millennials value autonomy and independence and want to be able to work in the way that suits them best. A millennial-friendly environment has to be digital, comfortable and creative. Millennials are hard workers known to work 50-60 hours a work including evenings and weekends, but did not want to sit in a bland cubicle all day (Anderson, 2016). Business houses have to focus on providing an employee-focussed environment that offers an engaging and stimulating atmosphere.

Work life balance had always been a priority for 95% of the millennials (Opinium Research, 2011). According to a study conducted by Fidelity Investments most millennial professionals would not mind taking a hefty pay cut if it meant improved work life balance. More importantly when evaluating an offer, 58 per cent millennials preferred improved quality of work life over financial benefits (Hofherr, 2016). This makes it imperative for managements to allow a flexible work schedule that permits them the freedom to work from home or elsewhere. Social media policies have to be made flexible based on trust to sanction use of online chat tools that allow staff to work remotely. More importantly, they need to train managers to assess employees' performance by results rather than the number of hours or where they work, and transform their offices to just become meeting spaces rather than a fixed location for the working day.

Recognition:

Past rewards and recognition programs would no longer suffice in motivating the millennials with one in four employers stating their current recognition programs were ineffective for millennial workers and 38 per cent of the workers wanting an improvement in their company's recognition programs (Starner, 2015). Managements would have to ingeniously strategise on nonfinancial rewards and supplement their recognition programs to motivate their new workforce. Millennials crave for instant appreciation of a job well done, and many companies have started using social media and apps to recognize their high achievers (Ayyar, 2016). Some effective recognition programs in addition to the regular avenues of appreciation are personalised employee rewards, handwritten notes, experiential rewards and "thank yous" from peers, managers or senior executives. More importantly, millennials want to comprehend as to how and why they earned recognition which should be emphasised when they are recognized (Boudinet, 2016).

Intergenerational Tension:

Managements must be aware that though majority of the millennials (76 per cent) enjoyed working with older senior management, there was evidence of some unconscious bias from the side of the older workers (Opinium Research, 2011) which needs to be addressed so that millennials would be judged on their results rather than on preconceptions. Additionally, over the coming years, millennials would be managing older workers which would lead to some resentment and conflicts. This makes it significant for human resource professionals to recognize that different generations may require different styles of management and that framing a transparent performance management system which clearly demonstrates how performance has to be rewarded becomes indispensable.

Loyalty Lite:

Millennials place more emphasis on their personal needs than those of the organisation and would not hesitate to move on if their expectations are not met. This absence of loyalty represents a serious challenge to any business employing a large number of millennials (Ferreras, 2016). Employers much accept that attrition rate of millennials would be higher than previous generations and should be prepared for this with a suitable plan as part of their human resource strategy.

Conclusion:

Indian industry has confronted many challenges - globalisation, technological advancement, sociopolitical and demographic changes - in the past and has succeeded in turning these to their advantage. Current statistics by the United Nations World Economic Situations and Prospects 2016 have revealed that India would account for 70 per cent of foreign investment in South Asia and would be one of the fastest growing economy in 2016 (India Today, 2016). This is a positive indicator for Indian industry to take steps to strengthen all critical aspects influencing their business operations and make the best of the forecasted growth opportunities. In an employment scenario where there is severe shortage of suitably skilled workers, finding, retaining and managing millennial talent optimally becomes important for an organisation's success. This research paper examines

certain key characteristics of millennial employees, their hopes and expectations, and emphasises the importance of creatively reshaping human resource policies to meet their desires. The study recommends a few employee benefit strategies that would be effective in arousing the millennials passion inspiring them to greater performance levels and also help in enhancing brand value and contribute positively to the attraction, management and retention of talented employees.

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